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# INDIGENOUS ISSUES

## Written statement submitted by the Centre Europe-Tiers Monde, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[17 March 1998]

GE.98-11396 (E)

1. The situation in Mexico regarding the issues which affect indigenous populations has not changed and persists two years after the signature of the Agreements of San Andrés. The problems are still unsolved.

2. After two years, the Federal Government, instead of respecting the Agreements, is campaigning against organizations, villages, communities and indigenous leaders. The Governments actions show us the evidence of this situation:

(a) The Government of Mexico has militarized the indigenous regions of Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Guanajato, Puebla, Jalisco, Nayarit, Tabasco, Campeche. This militarization shows the fear the Government has of the voice of indigenous people. The number of government troops is growing in Chiapas invading and carrying out interrogations in the Northern Zone communities, Selva, Altos de Chiapas, Sierra Mixe y Sierra Juarez, and the repression continues at Loxichas in Oaxaca;

(b) There has been a campaign against genuine indigenous representatives and leaders, through intimidation, imprisonment, torture and murder in the regions of Chiapas, Guerrero, Oaxaca and Huasteca and, recently, in Querétaro;

(c) The Government creates conflicts in the communities arming paramilitary groups which, supported by public security forces and even by the Federal Army, sow terror throughout Chiapas, trying to do the same in other regions of the country. The killing of Acteal, which is to be condemned in every sense from a human point of view, is evidence of the Government's policy of genocide.

3. While in Chiapas the Government's dirty war empties out the entire zone, creating more and more displaced persons who are surviving under inhuman conditions but who still have the dignity to refuse any help from those who put them in this dreadful situation, the Government continues to slander the indigenous people and to refuse to hear their petitions.

4. The Government also continues to persist in its mega-projects like the Tehuantepec Istmo which, without consulting the populations concerned, will rob the people of their natural resources, destroy their environment, break up community life and allow multinational enterprises to divide the country and seize its riches for themselves.

5. It is for all these reasons that the indigenous populations in Mexico insist:

(a) On compliance with the Agreements of San Andrés and that the Federal Constitution recognizes the right of self-determination expressed through autonomy;

(b) That the Government withdraw its contra proposal and that the Government support the original agreement of the COCOPA reforms dated 29 November 1996;

(c) That the Mexican Army leave the indigenous regions and return to their barracks, adhering strictly to what is stated in the Constitution;

(d) That the material and intellectual authors of the Acteal murders be punished and the paramilitary groups be disbanded and disarmed and their impunity brought to an end;

(e) On a halt to the persecution, torture, jailing and murder of indigenous leaders;

(f) On the liberation of prisoners who are the basis of Zapatista support and the liberation of political prisoners;

(g) The protection of indigenous territories and lands from all those who want to occupy them and reduce vital space for the enlargement of communities;

(h) On the reform and improvement of article 27 of the Constitution to return to the spirit in which it was originally conceived;

(i) On the cancellation and stopping of all the mega-projects started by the Government and the transnational enterprises, and compliance with the agreement signed in San Andrés regarding consultation with the local and indigenous populations for every project;

(j) On respect for sacred sites;

(k) Compliance with ILO Convention No. 169 which was signed and ratified by the Mexican Government.

6. The indigenous populations are again consigned to oblivion in the process of globalization in which Mexico is involved, and which was accelerated in 1994 with the Free Trade Agreement which was signed with the Governments of the United States and Canada. And at the most extreme form, when the peoples' lands are coveted either by the landlords or the oil, uranium or logging companies which undermine people's lives. All of this along with a military and paramilitary presence as the only response to their struggle for an equal society.

7. During our stay in Chiapas we were able to observe that the problem of land is still central to the conflict in Chiapas and that in the zones where there has been occupation of land or where the people have shown an ability to organize, white guards and militarization seem to be the only answer given.

8. The indigenous populations feel that their only guarantee against being consumed by the process of the world economic globalization is to struggle for the recognition of their own rights and culture, their forms of organization and the control over their natural resources. It is a struggle for survival and a rescue from oblivion, based on the memories of their own way of life.

9. The democratic transition of Mexico will not take place at the expense of the indigenous populations, but will only be possible to the extent that their rights to democracy, justice and freedom are guaranteed.

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